

**A STUDY FOR EFFECTIVE MINISTRY WITH  
THE KOREAN-AMERICAN ELDERLY**

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the Faculty of the  
School of Theology at Claremont**

**In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Ministry**

**by**

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## ABSTRACT

### A Study for Effective Ministry with the Korean-American Elderly

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The conventional understanding of aging is that it brings physical, emotional and economic powerlessness to persons. To the Korean-American elderly, such a negative understanding has been multiplied because of their cultural difference, language barrier, immobility and the generation gap between the elderly and their grandchildren.

Historically, the immigration of Koreans to the States started from 1903. In the 1960s, the numbers of immigrants rapidly increased seeking political freedom and a better education for their children. To the late comers, cultural adaptation is not complete but is still in progress. This causes, especially, the Korean-American elderly to suffer from culture shock and value crises.

In order to inquire into the depth of such problems and to find a possible solution, this project reports the findings of more than one hundred interviews with pastors and the elderly. From the West Coast to the East Coast, this project lifts up the common areas of negligence and effective ways to do elderly ministries and points to the urgent need for such ministry.

In detail, Chapter 1 presents an overview of this project. Chapter 2 focuses on biblical understandings of the aging. Chapter 3 discusses the identity-crisis issue.

Chapter 4 focuses on the problems in detail, such as the language barrier, immobility, and culture shock. Chapter 5 focuses on the creation of a care and counseling context for the Korean-American elderly in the churches and the emerging demand for spiritual care. Chapter 6 provides a theological basis for pastoral care for the elderly's fear of death. The issue of life after death is briefly discussed. Chapter 7 summarizes typical examples of ministry to the elderly in the New York and New Jersey areas. This chapter highlights the fundamental problems of ministring to the elderly. Chapter 8 deals with the issues of how to create a care-context for the elderly. Chapter 9 focuses on the development of the ministry with the elderly in church settings.

One of the most important contributions of this project will be the suggestion of a tentative guideline for effective ministry with the elderly. This is followed by an interim conclusion.

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## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

This project inquires into the problems of the Korean-American elderly, and suggests how well-planned pastoral care and counseling can resolve these problems, and help nurture them as healthy Christians. This project will also search for possible ways to train these elderly people and transform them into the leaders of a local church, maximizing their participation in mission and evangelism.

Based on this inquiry, this project will show the utmost importance of the ministry for the elderly people and its urgent need in the local church. The Korean-American elderly are generally frustrated by language barrier, loneliness, home sickness, powerlessness, and depression. In many local churches, furthermore, the whole portion of the elderly attending Sunday services are around 20-30 percent. This number is quite significant. In many churches there is no specific and proper ministerial approach toward the caring of the elderly, although it is the elderly people who sustain many Korean-American churches.

In the Korean immigrant society in general and the Korean American Church in particular, the Korean elderly are voiceless and invisible. The task for integrating the life experiences of the elderly people into the nurturing of the congregation by utilizing the elderly's wisdom and their spirituality seems to be understood as daydreaming. The

elderly people spend their time merely wandering down the street or sitting in a parking lot. Social services are not easily made available to them due to the problems of language and immobility. In this respect, Korean-American churches which devote themselves to the building of the Kingdom of God need to take the initiative to act as primary care-giving agencies. A local church not only provides a gathering place for the elderly, but it can provide other services, including legal advice, information on social security benefits and medical care, counseling, etc. A local church has such resources, yet it does not pay enough attention to this important area of ministry.

The Korean-American elderly also suffer from racial and cultural discrimination. In addition, the language barrier compounds the difficulty, and adds the feeling of dehumanization at every corner of their life. For instance, they have difficulties buying fast food,<sup>1</sup> transferring from one bus to the next, opening a bank account, paying a bill properly, etc. They experience the feeling of rejection from the English-speaking people, and thus, tend to withdraw to "Korea-Town." In this Korea Town, they do not have to use English at all. As a result, they do not have an opportunity to learn English. The elderly Korean immigrants

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<sup>1</sup> I interviewed Ho Sang Lee, 67 years old, at Korea Town in Los Angeles on 20 November 1991. He confessed that he could buy only a cheese burger all the time, for he did not know how to order different menu items and to receive the correct amount of change. He had the sense of fear when a cashier at the Hamburger store repeatedly asked what he wanted to order.

need help in all areas of their life: from physical care for safety, through proper language education, to spiritual discipline aiming for reconciliation with self, others, and God.

The fear of death and dying is also a serious issue for the Korean-American elderly, especially for those who have a more fundamentalistic sense of eternal punishment in the fire of hell after death. They also suffer losses including the loss of jobs, vitality, health, and even a loving family in the aging process.

While such losses are painful, well balanced care can give them turning points for reflecting on the inner self, for spiritual growth and for the enjoyment of a creative elderly life.

In this study, I will deal with three problem areas elderly Koreans face. First, they are severely handicapped by the English language. Most of them cannot communicate in English. The language barrier may even isolate them even from their own children as well as from their American neighbors. Second, their inability to drive vehicles makes them dependent upon their children. For instance, when their children are too busy to give them a ride or pick them up at the right time, this creates a sense of helplessness and loneliness which, in turn, brings the sense of homesickness. Finally, they have difficulties handling culture shock. Even though they now live in a foreign environment, they are deeply enculturated by the traditional

Confucian values. The Confucian values are entrenched in their views. In Korea, for instance, the elderly people live in an extended family structure which more or less guarantees the security of the elderly to the end of their life. Traditionally, the first son of the family took care of his parents. This Korean tradition is difficult to maintain in American society since people usually leave their parents' home early thereby leaving the elderly alone. These problems (language barrier, immobility, and cultural difference) are only part of the difficulties the elderly face, and they are crucial when we consider the requirements of an effective ministry for the Korean American elderly.

To develop an effective ministry with the Korean elderly, the following programs need to be seriously considered. The Korean-American churches have acted as community centers providing Korean immigrants with social and religious services. The church is the place where these lonely people mingle together and share their feelings of frustration, isolation, anger, home sickness, etc., under proper ministerial guidance. The church functions not only as a religious center but also as a social center. Practically, organizing support groups for elderly Koreans may be a viable solution. The Korean pastors must be equipped with pastoral care and counseling experience along with their preaching and teaching skill. Thus, continuing education in pastoral care and counseling for the pastors is a necessary requirement. Offering basic English courses for

daily conversation would help the Korean elderly to express their basic needs in English and consequently reduce, in part, the frustration caused by their language barrier in their daily life. Korean churches must develop theoretical principles and appropriate pastoral care programs to care for the lonely seniors.

This project attempts to provide a guideline for the ministry with the elderly and to help the elderly deal with the problems they experience. Its major focus is on calling Korean American ministers and church leaders to become sensitive to the needs of Korean American elderly. This research is based on library research, field study and interviews.

## CHAPTER 2

### **Biblical Views on Aging**

In this chapter, we will identify the biblical perspective on aging. As ministry should be firmly structured and operated upon a biblical basis, we cannot omit the search to find a biblical basis for ministry to the elderly.

#### **Old and New Testament Perspectives**

##### **Aging is a Blessing**

In the Old Testament, it cannot be mistaken that aging is a blessing from God. "The Old Testament portrays extreme old age as a sign of life full of blessing and vitality."<sup>1</sup> It can be understood that longevity is a blessing from God as "the Old Testament understands....old [age] as a marvel of a well-rounded, fulfilled life."<sup>2</sup>

In the Old Testament, people knew that their lives were much shorter than their ancestors. In Genesis 6:3, Yahweh declares that human life shall be no more than "a hundred and twenty years." Sirach 18:9 states: "The number of a man's days is great if he reaches a hundred years." And Psalm 90:10 says: "The days of our life span amount to seventy years, and in their full strength to eighty years."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Rolf Knierim, "Age and Aging in the Old Testament," Ministry with the Aging, ed. William M. Clements (New York: Haworth Press, 1989), 23.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 24.

In the old times, a life of seventy or more years seemed quite long since the average life expectancy was thirty or forty years in the early eighteenth century. "In 1776, a child born in America could expect to live to 35, on the average. A century later, life expectancy was only 40, and the median age was 21."<sup>4</sup>

However, in the Old Testament, the achievement of the fullness of life that was given by God was what mattered. A person who lives their life span is regarded as blessed. The Old Testament asserts, "the rightness, goodness, and promise of life in its full span and, consequently, claims aging and old age as the actualization of life's fullness."<sup>5</sup> The main point of life is not its length, but rather the actualization of one's full potentiality and the quality of life. In short, the Old Testament teaches that whether the average life is long or short, a person who lives their life span is considered a blessed one, and thus, the quality of life is of primary concern. A life is a gift from God.

#### Protection and Filial Respect

From the Old Testament account, the aged have been protected by their family as well as by the community. Clements defines such an ethos among people as follows: "Society's protection of the elderly begins with protection

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<sup>4</sup> Ken Dychtwald and Joe Flower, Age Wave (Los Angeles: Jeremy P. Tarcher, 1989), 4.

<sup>5</sup> William Clements, "Introduction: The New Context for Ministry with the Aging," Ministry with the Aging (New York: Haworth Press, 1989), 25.

by the family, basically expressed in the fifth commandment of the Decalogue: "Honor your father and your mother" (Exod. 20:12; see also Deut. 5:16; and Lev. 19:3).<sup>6</sup>

Contrary to such a teaching in the Decalogue in particular as well as the Old Testament in general, the elderly people today do not receive respect from their own family. What has produced such result? The fifth commandment of the Decalogue has slowly faded away as a result of changes in the social structure. "Honor your father and your mother," will have no power unless the nuclear family system continuously respects the elderly people as the Decalogue asks. As the social structures change, older people are gradually becoming less important to the family and to the society while their productivity of labor decreases.

How can the churches help these people? Can the church influence these socio-economic structures? The church thinks of quantity more than quality, or the number of members than the meaning of their life. Sometimes, the church looks to the people merely to increase the church budget. It seems that the church is not interested in caring for and respecting the elderly who need special care. "Honor your father and your mother" seems to be empty lip service rather than a commandment. Now we turn our focus toward the distinctive perspective of the Old Testament on the elderly in detail.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 28.

### Advisors and Judges

In the Old Testament, there is evidence of older people's status as significant advisors of family or royal councils. Knierim says:

We can infer from our knowledge, especially about Israel's judicial system, that old men played a significant role as elders in the councils in the gates (Ruth 4:1-12), and in the royal councils (1 Kings 12:6-11). "Old men" functioned as advisors to the king in the royal council, and they participated in the gate in the arbitration of litigations and the adjudication of crimes. They were the most experienced in custom and law, and had the indispensable background needed for wise and balanced judgment. They personified the living tradition. Thus, the affairs of the community were in the best hands "in the assembly of the elders" (Ps. 107:32; Job. 29:8).<sup>7</sup>

Old men once acted as judges and advisors to the king in the council. Undoubtedly, they were respected by people because of their long experience with their custom and law. Older people today, however, are not fully respected even though they have much experiences and wisdom. In the modern and post modern society that is increasingly becoming mechanized and dependent upon high technology, old people find it impossible to keep up with rapidly advancing technology and are passed by. Human dignity is measured by the materialistic merit. Money, instead of experience and wisdom, is respected. The power of money replaces the value of experience. As a result, older people who depend on social security and other's support for their living are

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<sup>7</sup> Rolf Knierim, "Age and Aging in the Old Testament," Ministry with the Aging (New York: Haworth Press, 1989), 31.

left behind, simply spending the last stage of their life without meaning, dignity or respect.

What can the church do to help them? The church must not sacrifice her mission and even her existence by ignoring the elderly, for the population of the elderly is rapidly increasing. Furthermore, the elderly tend to be stable in their attendance. Considering the effectiveness of the membership building, the mission to the elderly is one of the most important tasks for the church today. They can be also rich resources for the church; some can be lay preachers, home visiting members, and other social service workers.

#### Blessers

One very important role of old people in the Old Testament was to bless their children before their own death. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph were all called blessers:

Old people played a very important role when they came to exercise what we call their last will or testament. When people, particularly fathers, were about to die, they assembled their children, gave them final instructions, blessed them, and praised God. In a last testamentary activity, they "set their house in order" (2 Sam. 17:23; 2 Kings 20:1) and transferred not only their possessions but the totality of the heritage of their tradition on to the next generation.<sup>8</sup>

During the patriarchal era of Israel, the father's role was to bless his eldest son. This was very important to the child. Being blessed, the eldest son would not only get his

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

father's properties, but also his spiritual blessing from God through his father. The story of Jacob is well known. He took his elder brother's blessing at the final day of Isaac. Thus, Jacob stole what was to be his older brother's. Both in the Old Testament and in Far eastern countries, old people have been regarded as specially gifted persons who had the tremendous gift of blessing to their children.<sup>9</sup>

#### Wisdom

Without exception, those who held wisdom were the elderly in the Old Testament. Without wisdom, the elderly had nothing special. Knierim highlights this point as following:

We have good reason to assume that the teachers of wisdom, those standing behind the Books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, were generally depicted as and called "fathers," and were not young men. They were old (at least older). If we perceive these books and their contents as the legacy of old people, we can get a taste of the importance old people had in their societies, of what they were capable of doing, and more importantly, of the enormous esteem that wisdom--by and large represented by the old people--had in the society.<sup>10</sup>

The Books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes are like treasure ships of wisdom. Today, the younger generation does not want to get wisdom through the elderly; they want the power

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<sup>9</sup>This is similar to the tradition in the Far eastern countries such as Korea, China, Japan, etc. until a decade ago. In the Korean tradition, the eldest son is usually given more than half of his father's possessions. Thus, the son must support his parents until their deaths and pay for their funerals.

<sup>10</sup> Knierim, 34-35.

to rule over all things including the elderly. They now ignore the power of human experiences cumulated throughout human history.

#### To Assist

The elderly people were treated with dignity and respect in the New Testament times, too. Jean Laporte says "The Early Church (of the first through fifth centuries) not only provided the elderly with material assistance, but also offered them an important role in the community which raised them to an honorable status."<sup>11</sup> Also, "The Early Church found her duty to help the poor, particularly widows and orphans, written in Scripture (Deut. 10:18, 14:29, 24:17-22; Ps. 68:6; Isa. 1:17; see also Mark 12:42 and Luke 7:12, 18:3)."<sup>12</sup>

As stated above, it was thought that the duty of the church was to help the poor and the weak, such as widows, orphans and the elder people. Thus, there is no difference between the era of the Old Testament and the Early Church. Also, as in the Old Testament, it was considered the responsibility of the family and society to assist and protect the elderly. The elderly also held the important role of advisors in the community as the members of the church council.

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<sup>11</sup> Jean Laporte, "The Elderly in the Life and Thought of the Early Church," Ministry with the Aging, ed. William M. Clements (New York: Haworth Press, 1989), 37.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

**To Respect**

To respect the elderly was a very important lesson for the younger generations to learn in the early Christian era. During this time, the elderly played a significant spiritual role for younger people and the community. As Jean Laporte says:

Early Christianity paid marks of respect to the elderly and ascribed to them a significant spiritual role. In the writings of the Early Church, the elderly appear as the wise counselors of the young, with emphasis on Christian ideals of prayer, fasting, and continence. These ideals, which had been to some extent the privilege of the elderly, particularly of the widows, later on became monopolized by virginity and monasticism.<sup>13</sup>

Without respect, there is be no support, assistance, help, veneration, or reverence for the elderly from their family or society.

Why should the rest of society have to respect the elderly? A point of view in the Early Church, as Laporte points out, was that age itself has a certain dignity. He states that "the importance of the elderly in the Early Church is in itself a mark of respect. Early Christian writings show that the elderly were the top of the pyramid of Christian society."<sup>14</sup>

How can we understand this "certain dignity of the elderly"? There is an Oriental saying, "The span of life depends on Heaven's Will." While longevity is a very special blessing given by God, the span of life has been

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 43.

understood as containing a certain dignity within itself, and also as a gift from God. When God gives such a precious gift, God may have a special will not only for the elderly but for the whole people. We, especially the younger generation, should try to figure out what it would be with the special sense of respect for it is given by God.

#### Counselors and Spiritual Guides

As the elderly once acted as advisers or judges to younger people and to the community or royal councils, they also played a similar role as counselors and spiritual guides or physicians of the soul, and were very highly respected for that in the era of the Early Church, as Laporte points out.

New Testament discussions of the behavior and responsibilities of older men and women, and of widows in particular, require from them a high level of Christian perfection: personal, familial, and ecclesiastical. Those who fulfilled these requirements were certainly good guides, counselors, and, eventually, physicians of souls.<sup>15</sup>

In the modern church, the elderly no longer play the role of counselors and healers as they did in the olden times. The elderly in most cases are out-dated. Thus, the community in general and younger people in particular no longer seem to need the help of the elderly. The elderly seem to be obstacles to people and are therefore ignored in modern society. This is painful, too, to the aged. The church has forgotten its duty to respect the elderly and has

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15 Ibid., 51.

undervalued their role. It seems that the church does not want to invest in programs for the elderly in local churches, since their financial contribution is lower than the younger church members.

#### Widows

Most of our evidence about the place of elderly widows in the Early Church is related to the case of those widows who, because they were old and destitute, were materially supported by the Church. Since they had no family, they had plenty of time which they could devote to God. Paul writes that the status of a "widow of the Church" is to be granted to "one who is alone in the world, has her hope on God, and regularly attends the meeting for prayer and worship night and day" (1 Tim. 5:5). This style of life combines in Patristic literature with the description of Anna, who became the model of sincere Christian widows.<sup>16</sup> Not to be forgotten is that elderly widows were supported by the Church; as Laporte emphasizes, they devoted their life to God and the church.

The modern church will do well to remember the elderly widows' spiritual contribution in their prayer and seek to support them however they can. The church must care for and support those people.

In sum, the aged were supported, respected, protected, and assisted by family, community, society, and royalty in the Old Testament era as well as in the Early Church era.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 45-46.

Also, the aged acted as soul healers, counselors, judges, advisors and blessers by virtue of their experience and wisdom. Furthermore, it is recognized that aging itself was regarded as a blessing and gift from God. And, the quality of life was regarded as more important than the extension of the life span itself. But today's situation is very different from those days.

The problems of aging in modern society and the church's neglect to care for them will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. For this task, we will focus on the identity and status of Korean-American elderly in the United States.

## CHAPTER 3

**The Identity of Korean Immigrants in the United States**

In order to understand the problems the elderly face in Korean American churches, we need to first clarify the self-understanding of the Korean immigrants. The identity crisis is one of the most important underlying factors of the elderly's problems. Likewise, the Korean immigrants in the United States are often described by the main stream, i.e., in TV programs, caricatures and songs as yellow, short, flat-faced, and non-original Christians. Such fixed images enhance the feeling of alienation, discrimination and segregation to the Korean-American in general and the elderly Korean immigrants in particular because of the language barrier and their less inculcated value system.

There are three types of self-understandings of Korean immigrant identity: First, one can identify oneself as completely American. Second, one can identify oneself as Korean and act as if he/she still lived in Korea. Finally, one can identify him/herself with a mixture of the two cultures. Which is the best solution for Korean-Americans who live in the States? It would be easy to suggest the third type as the best since they live in a "melting-pot" society. If this idea is not generalized with "WASP" (White-Anglo-Saxon-Protestant) values, it may contribute to harmonize the two cultures, the Korean and the American. It would be a good strategy to integrate the two in a constructive way rather than taking an either/or stance.

### Historical Background

It is necessary to reflect on the history of Korean immigration to the United States in order to understand the crucial issue of the identity crisis of the Korean-American elderly. Korean-American elderly still sustain the Korean traditional value system and cultural heritage even as they are influenced by Christian faith from the beginning. In order to make this statement a sound argument, we need to hear two Korean-American sociologists' opinions. Won Moo Hurh and Kwang Chung Kim give a historical overview of Korean immigration to the United States as follows:

The history of Korean immigration to America thus began in 1903. On January 13, 1903, 101 Korean immigrants (55 men, 21 women, and 25 children) on board the S.S. Gaelic, a U.S. merchant ship, arrived in Honolulu, Hawaii. By 1905 a total of 7,226 Korean immigrants (6,048 men, 637 women, 541 children) had reached Hawaiian shores by 65 different ships (Warren Kim, 1971:10). Such a relatively large influx of Korean immigrants within a short period of time was not to take place again until late 1965.<sup>1</sup>

In the history of Korean immigration to the United States, American missionaries played an important role in persuading Koreans to emigrate to Hawaii. Half of the first immigrants were the members of NaeRi Methodist Church in InCheon, Korea.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Won Moo Hurh and Kwang Chung Kim, Korean Immigrants in America (Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1984), 39-41.

<sup>2</sup> In addition, the American minister in Seoul, Dr. Horace N. Allen, the first physician-missionary sent by the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions of the United States, became one of the most trusted of the Korean King's advisers.

In the early 1900s, one-third of all Koreans in Hawaii were professing themselves as Christians. They dominated the life in the early plantation camps, and soon Korean "churches" (meeting places for worship) were established wherever Koreans lived in Hawaii and on the mainland. The first worship service was held at the plantation camp in Molokai on July 4, 1903, under the leadership of I-che Kim. The place of worship may have been the living quarters of the camp. These services among the Korean immigrants, even without any contact with the American mission churches, continued for three months.<sup>3</sup>

Influenced by the dominant Christian culture in the United States, early immigrants became Christian although they had practiced Buddhism, Taoism, or Confucianism in Korea. Korean immigrants found hardly any conventional support for their original religions. Between 1903 and 1924, several churches were established by Korean immigrants in Hawaii, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Oakland.<sup>4</sup> In the beginning, there were five different denominations among the Korean Christians, namely, Methodist, Presbyterian, Episcopalian, Baptist, and Catholic. Later, the number of denominations increased to twelve.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See Bong-youn Choy, Koreans in America (Chicago: Nelson Hall, 1979), 253-55.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 253-56.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 257.

There were a few Buddhists and some Confucian scholars among the earlier Korean immigrants, but they converted to Christianity eventually. Therefore, the Christian religion was really the only religion practiced by the Korean community, and the church became the center force of the immigrant community in the United States until the end of the Second World War.<sup>6</sup>

Bong-youn Choy carefully explains why the early Korean Christian churches became centers of the Korean community.

The leaders of the Korean churches were dedicated Christian servants, and they had a strong sense of responsibility for the improvement of the Korean community. Most of the church leaders understood the emotional and physical problems of the immigrants and had a sympathetic attitude toward them. The Korean immigrants, whether Christian or non-Christian, felt that they could talk their problems over with the pastors. On Sunday, they worshipped together and had social gatherings after the services. They enjoyed meeting friends and talking to each other in their native language. They shared their problems and helped each other whenever someone was in trouble. Thus, the churches emerged as the center of hope and social life for the early Koreans in the United States.<sup>7</sup>

Since then, however, the religions practiced by Korean immigrants have become more pluralistic. Korean immigrants practice not only Christianity but also Buddhism, Confucianism, Korean Taoism, and Korean Shamanism. There are many Korean fortunetellers in the Los Angles area. In a 1991 advertising section of the Korea Times (Los Angeles),

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

seventeen fortune-tellers were listed.<sup>8</sup> Their religions (or philosophies) are most likely Shamanism mixed with other religions, i.e., Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism.

When Korean immigrants came to this country from the beginning, the only religion immigrants had access to was Christianity; but this phenomena has been changed. Elderly Koreans miss their cultural roots and their old religions with which they feel more comfortable than with western Christianity. They miss practicing Shamanism, Korean Taoism, Korean Confucianism, and Korean Buddhism, religions which traditionally emphasized the value of filial relationship and elderly respect. Therefore, Korean-American pastors now must be prepared to deal with this problem of the elderly with pluralistic views for the pastors immediate task and mission as well as social service.

#### Social Background

Traditional social classifications such as Yangban (the upper class) and Sangmin (the lower and labor class) in Korean society are rejected by Korean immigrants in the United States.<sup>9</sup> This tendency allows Korean immigrants to feel a sense of freedom from their culture-bound social pressures. Contrary to traditional Korean society, labor is

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<sup>8</sup> Korea Times (Los Angeles) 13 Dec. 1991, advertising section.

<sup>9</sup> See Choy, 21-22.

no longer a sign of the Sangmin class,<sup>10</sup> but a means of fulfilling one's dreams in the United States. They assumed America is a wonderful, classless society.

In this respect, the United States was regarded as a country of freedom. Korean immigrants had hopes, visions, and dreams in the new land. However, they had to work very hard--often ten to sixteen hours a day, seven days a week. They found freedom but were put in a situation in which hard work was the only way to survive, resulting in physical and psychological problems. It is a decisively burdensome freedom.

Nowadays, Korean immigrants still find that they must work hard to survive. For example, taxi drivers must work 12 hours a day, six days a week.<sup>11</sup> For Korean immigrants in their sixties, decent jobs are difficult to find due to their language barrier, cultural differences and rapid technical development. Thus, they have fallen into the bottom-line of workers for survival in the United States. According to Bong-youn Choy, the majority of new Korean immigrants were told that the United States was a land of

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid. The Sangmin (commoners) were divided into various sub-groups such as farmers, merchants, artisans, and fishermen.

<sup>11</sup> I was a taxi driver from 1984 to 1986 in New York City. I drove 12 hours a day and worked six days a week. I earned about \$400 per week. There are more than one thousand Korean taxi drivers in New York City. Among them, a few were retired generals of the Korean military; they have to work as taxi drivers, which requires a simple skill, to survive in the U.S.A., regardless of their former status in Korea.

opportunity and happiness, in terms of economic betterment and political freedom. But as soon as they landed in America, they found that this image was exaggerated. The immigrants faced many problems and obstacle. Most of the newcomers--including intellectuals, professionals and skilled workers--found that they were unable to find significant employment in their own fields because of language barriers, cultural conflicts, and lack of continuous training.<sup>12</sup>

What can we learn from this? Is the United States a Land of Paradise? In fact, there is no paradise on the earth. The dreams of Korean immigrants failed, at least, to a great extent. Even their acknowledgment of a "glass ceiling"--an invisible obstacle to certain people barring them from promotion to higher position--gives them the sense of hopelessness. Some of them want to return to Korea, yet they manage to accept that they cannot return to Korea. The rapid economic growth in Korea has degraded the value of the currency which they have saved; therefore, they do not have enough money to establish a new business in Korea. For example, if a Korean immigrant can open a new market with \$100,000 in the States, he or she needs more than \$300,000 in Korea because she or he must pay some premium money to the previous owner in Korea. In Korea, a 500 square foot house is worth more than \$150,000 nowadays. These experiences deepen the powerlessness of the Korean American

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<sup>12</sup> See Choy, 219-20.

immigrants, so they may feel there is no exit. The social environment seems to be very harsh to Korean-Americans.

#### Psychological Background

All Korean immigrants want to have a successful life in the new land. This is a common expectation of Korean immigrants, both young and old. This is why they work so hard. Reflecting the depth of their experiences in a foreign environment, Korean immigrants have gone from estrangement to adaptation of American culture and values through the various psychological stages of the enculturation process. According to Won Moo Hurh and Kwang Chung Kim, the stages range from shrinking aspirations to contentment measured by their degree of life satisfaction.<sup>13</sup>

The psychological hardships of adjustment to the foreign culture is even worse for the elderly. Eldery Koreans who immigrate in their sixties or seventies have difficulty adjusting to the new culture. Even though they may initially be exited about their new situation, regardless of their ability to speak English, they ultimately feel a sense of isolation and inability to assimilate into American culture. They are less likely to succeed in learning English, American customs, and skills for survival than younger immigrants.

A sense of social isolation and feelings of loneliness deepen psychological problems facing elderly Korean immigrants. Typical Korean immigrant problems include: (1)

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<sup>13</sup> See Hurh and Kim, 140.

the language barrier, (2) unemployment or underemployment, (3) social isolation (loneliness, especially for the elderly), (4) culture shock in general, and (5) living in a senior citizen or government apartment.<sup>14</sup> The Korean elderly cannot escape their loneliness when dealing with social isolation in general.

I experienced these problems first-hand through a close observation of a well known pastor: the late Reverend HyungKi Ryu, a former Korean bishop who lived in Los Angeles. He was 91 years old in 1988. He lost his wife several years before that time. He attended the Wilshire Korean United Methodist Church. The pastor was Chang-soon Lee. Although his whole life was devoted to God and congregation, Rev. Ryu confessed helplessness, hopelessness, and loneliness. He lived alone in a one bedroom apartment. Every Sunday, some members of the church served him lunch. His relatives gave him a ride to church every Sunday. He had a son and daughter, but they lived in other states. He died in 1990.

We can find a strong sense of relationship between his life story and the difficulties the Korean immigrants experience today. Rev. Ryu was one of the earliest immigrants to the United States. He worked for the Korean immigrants throughout his life in the States, yet few people in the States gave him respect. On the contrary, he would have received great respect if he had lived in Korea.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 141.

In this chapter, I reflected on Korean immigrants' identities in historical, religious, social and psychological contexts. Finally, it can be summed up from all reflections that loneliness is one of the most difficult problems among the Korean elderly immigrants.

Then, how can the Korean elderly overcome the loneliness that results from the social isolation they are faced with in the United States? One way is to live with the younger generation family members and share their wisdom with the young. Another is for the church to find out the treasure of aging or, especially, to reinterpret it theologically. In the book Age Wave, Ken Dychtwald and Joe Flower say that aging should be a time in which the elderly experience themselves, others, and the world in a new way.

If living longer meant only spending more years in declining old age, most of us would not choose it. But today we face a different choice. What the late twentieth century has begun to give us is the prospect of many more years before the arrival of old age. The effects of this great gift will ripple through our lives in many unexpected ways. With more leisure time in our lives, we will tend to seek out deeper experiences, experiences that are more exotic, that teach us more about the world and ourselves, that satisfy more of our own needs, and that make us more useful in satisfying the needs of others.<sup>15</sup>

The elderly have a deposit of many experiences throughout their lives. They have gained knowledge from their experiences, and thus they can offer practical wisdom to the younger generation. Their experiences include the wisdom distilled from their long life. The elderly should

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<sup>15</sup> Dychtwald and Flower, 170-71.

be helped not to give up their role in their old age for the younger generation. The aged can share wisdom with the young to help them live a better life. The elderly have to share their experiences and distilled wisdom with the new generation. They are an important resource and must share their knowledge with coming generations, whether they can speak English or not. We should help the elderly in a constructive way to see their life-experience as meaningful and useful. For they are a most abundant human resource for future ministry as well. For this task, we may need to help them to be re-educated in a more systematic way in order to catch up with the rapid changes in the society. We will investigate such possibilities in the next chapter, especially focusing on the role of the church in this education process.

## CHAPTER 4

**Some Problems of the Korean Elderly in the United States**

The language barrier is a critical issue for the Korean elderly in the United States. Not only does it isolate the elderly from society but also from their second and third generation relatives. Other related problems of immobility and culture shock additionally cause the elderly to feel powerlessness, isolation and loneliness.

**Case Study: Language Barrier**

In order to articulate the problems mentioned before, it seems proper to share my personal story first and later to generalize this story by mentioning several similar case studies. My parents lived with my family in New York City for several years. My parents could not speak, write, or understand English at all. My first child was born in Seoul, and came to the United States when she was nine months old. My second child was born in New York City. So, my children speak English very well but understand little Korean. Therefore, my parents and my children had difficulty communicating with each other. My parents from time to time felt isolated from their grandchildren even though they loved them dearly. They especially felt isolated when my children did not respect them according to the traditional Korean custom. They attempted to teach Korean customs, i.e., bowing to the elderly, greeting them every morning before going to school and after returning from school, etc. However, my children hardly understood their grandparent's

language. My parents wondered why their grandchildren could not speak, write or understand Korean, and the children wondered why their grandparents could not speak, write, or understand English.

For a while, however, my parents lived in an apartment built by the government in Detroit for elderly Korean people. My elder brother, who is a U.M.C. pastor, lives 40 miles away from my parents' apartment. I had the opportunity to look around where they lived. Even though my parents did not live with their eldest son in the United States, they seemed happy, perhaps because my parents had many friends there: 90 percent of the residents in the apartments were elderly Korean people. Such an environment also resolved language problems; my parents did not have to communicate in English while living there. This is a typical experience of the first generation Koreans who immigrated to America in the 1960s and 1970s or 1980s.

#### Immobility

Immobility is one of the issues plaguing the elderly Korean people. In this country where the public transportation system is less developed than Korea and many other countries, those who cannot drive a car are severely limited, whether they are Americans or Koreans. Such a limitation creates difficult problems for men and women in general. Most of the Korean elderly who came to the United States in their sixties or seventies are not familiar with an auto culture, and thus they do not know how to drive. In

an auto culture like American society, they have to depend on their adult children whenever they need to go to their friends, their relatives, or the market.

Until the late 1960s, the economic situation in Korea was not that good. Thus, most Korean people, other than the upper class, did not own cars. However, even though they did not own cars, they did not feel isolated and were not prevented from going where they wanted to go. They traveled to various places by a well developed public transportation system including buses and, more recently, the subway. Even taxi fare in most cities is one-tenth of the fare in the United States. In New York City there is relatively less limitation compared to other U.S. cities; for example, the Korean elderly can visit their friend's house by bus or train. But in Los Angles, they hardly use public transportation. Lack of transportation is one reason the Korean elderly get frustrated and lonely. They are eager to stick together around the Korea town in downtown Los Angeles

#### Culture Shock

According to Paul G. Schurman, "The research and emerging literature dealing with cross-cultural issues are sources of hope."<sup>1</sup> Although I agree with him on this point of "hope," it seems to be "despair" for the elderly Korean Americans to live in a cross-cultural setting. Moreover,

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<sup>1</sup> Paul G. Schurman, "Pastoral Care across Cultures," Handbook for Basic Types of Pastoral Care and Counseling, eds. Howard W. Stone and William M. Clements (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 95.

the Korean people have suffered from the unresolved feeling of "Han" (한). Han is a complicated psychological state, involving feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, unresolved anger, and oppression caused by socio-political structures and given unequal status.<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, comparing the potentiality to adjust themselves to the alien environment, future generations who come to this country or are born here may have more hope in their future than the Korean elderly in today's society. They might have some hope about their children and their grandchildren. Because the Korean elderly cannot communicate in English in their inability to adjust to the American soil, they shrink and withdraw from society in general as well as from their grandchildren in particular. In Korea, they would be respected and the head of the house, yet they feel they are useless and out-dated in this country. Such an emotion deepens their feeling of Han.

However, this problem cannot easily be resolved by an individual house setting, for it is closely related and connected with cultural and social behavior patterns. At this point, so-called cultural issues including religious matters are raised. Steve Shim summarizes a view which suggests a hopeful future for counseling the aged based on a community ethic.

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<sup>2</sup> Han as "given status" is my interpretation. Especially, "given status" comes from my own thinking of Han in terms of cosmology, ontology, and limitation of time and space.

Korean individuals are always seeking to behave and act in the social context with a pursuit of harmony and peace with one's neighbors. In so doing, the Korean individuals tend to place the community- need/others over against one's own needs. By pursuing interdependence rather than independence, they are behavior seeking to keep harmony and peace with others. For this need, they seldom confront others behavior, tending to suppress themselves in the public eyes for the sake of harmony and peace. Because of belief in peace and harmony, the Korean individuals place peace and harmony over the necessity of justice and law in crowd behavior.<sup>3</sup>

This quote explains the basic characteristics of the Korean people, or Korean cultural values. What are the differences between the Korean culture and the American culture? There are different customs, values, religions, socio-economic status, etc. The Korean aged are accustomed to Korean traditions since they have lived in Korea for most of their lives.

In Korea, the Korean elderly were religion oriented, for they were exposed to a variety of religions including Shamanism, Taoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. Korean ancestors kept and cultivated some religions for over 4,000 years. Christianity in Korea is a relatively new religion, introduced only about one hundred years. After the elderly emigrate to the United States, they are exposed to Christianity and became Christians for the first time in their life. To be a Korean American elderly Christian means to be estranged from not only social and traditional

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<sup>3</sup> Steve Sangkwon Shim, A Clinical Case Study of "HAN" Experiences among Korean Immigrants in Southern California: A Cross-Cultural Pastoral Counseling Perspective, Ph.D. Diss., School of Theology at Claremont, Calif., 1990 (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1990), 211-12.

values of Korea but also Korean religious systems. This gives them cultural as well as religious shock.

From this account, ministers caring for and nurturing the Korean American elderly should be equipped with a cultural as well as religious sensitivity. Being Christian should not mean giving up one's own cultural heritage, but rather realizing God has many names and many types of spiritual lives, and seeing God's work in those.

Our task is to transform the culture shock which the Korean elderly experience to a positive experience of cultural richness and a traditional way of overcoming, that is, resolving religious conflicts. In addition, affirming the Korean culture and appreciating the American culture at the same time helps the elderly become better adjusted. Korean-American pastors are called to help the Korean elderly integrate the two cultures in a meaningful way. In the next chapter, we will inquire into this possibility of such a transformation and suggest a method to make this possibility an actuality.

## CHAPTER 5

### Pastoral Care and Counseling for the Korean-American Elderly

Pastoral care in general and pastoral counseling in particular itself does not make sense to the Korean-American elderly. Many Korean elderly assume that pastoral counseling or psychological counseling deals with mentally disordered people. Mental disorder is for the Korean regarded as (to some degree) punishment from God. In other words, Korean elderly generally suspect the exercise of pastoral counseling and its efficacy.

Moreover, most books about pastoral care were written by authors who grew up with Western philosophies, theologies and psychology. It seems that most of these authors were not fully concerned with what the Eastern tradition, history, and life experiences might be like. Howard Clinebell speaks of the need to make "counseling more inclusive and pluralistic." He states:

Like psychotherapeutic theory in general, pastoral counseling has been predominately middle-class in its concepts, methods, and models of healing. To respond effectively to the needs of people in the next fifteen years, those who practice this pastoral art must transcend the Anglo-European, middle-class, White male orientation of these disciplines. In a world of increasing inter-action among persons of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, broadening our horizons as pastoral counselors is increasingly important.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Howard Clinebell, Basic Types of Pastoral Care and Counseling, rev. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), 96-97.

Clinebell wrote the first edition of this book in 1966. One might wonder how pastoral care has developed in terms of inducing transcultural and pluralistic perspectives in the twenty eight years between 1966 to 1996. He indicated that the pastoral art must transcend its limitations of unicultural perspective.

Keeping this in mind, it is now necessary to focus on the "turning point" issue, which means to reflect on one's life and to reestablish one's life style and goals. Douglas C. Kimmel explains the turning point as following: "As people look back over their lives, or as they plan for the future, they see some events that stand out as especially important markers or turning points in their life cycle; we call these milestones."<sup>2</sup> "Turning point" is used to mean a creativity to overcome despair in the aging process during final stages of life.

A turning point needs to be facilitated for the Korean elderly in the United States to help them bring their past memories and restructure them in a positive way. According to Kimmel, one may not have a vision about his or her future because he or she does not have a serious turning point in his or her final life. So, it is important that Korean ministers help the elderly make sense of their lives and help them bravely to confront their lives in a constructive

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<sup>2</sup> Douglas C. Kimmel, Adulthood and Aging, 3rd ed. (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1990), 39.

way with a turning point, combining their resources and applying them to their current life.

For a biblical example, we can think of Abraham who had not had a son until he was over one hundred years old. He had reminded his God of the divine promise. Later, his wife Sarah was pregnant and gave birth to a baby, Isaac. This was a turning point in Abrahams life; he even changed his name. (Whether this biblical story is scientifically or literally possible or not is beside the point.) What is important here is to recognize that life holds a unique place for everyone and may have a special meaning for a particular person, whether he or she is young or old. Furthermore, the Reformers held a vision, which we the Protestants generally follow, that everybody has the potential to become a new being in God's Kingdom; everyone can be saved in spite of his or her sin. Therefore, ministers in Korean-American churches should challenge the Korean elderly to create positive turning points in their lives to find meaning here and now, and to have an outlook on their future in a more positive way.

#### Spiritual Care and Life Review

The language barrier, immobility, culture shock, or any aspect of American society that differs from Korean society will cause the elderly Korean people uneasiness, isolation, frustration, and loneliness.

Pastoral care can help them cope with loneliness and other related problems. The pastor should and can explain

that loneliness is not confined only to old people; it is a general human emotion experienced regardless of age. Therefore, we must accept loneliness as a part of being human; one cannot fully overcome loneliness due to the process of socialization, so called "being an (independent) individual." We must accept loneliness (of the elderly Korean immigrant) resulting from existential conditions in the process of "formation of self-identity" just as we must accept death at the end of life. Unlike language barriers, immobility and cultural differences, loneliness is not directly related to social situations itself. Rather, it is a common phenomenon regardless of race, gender and age. From this account, pastoral care needs to focus on the elderly's loneliness as a result of human conditions and attempt to resolve it by developing individual and group programs in the church setting.

In addition to dealing with the problem of loneliness, the elderly need to deal with their coming death, that is, overcoming the fear of "death and punishment." Therefore, spiritual care should also be provided to the elderly to help them expand their limited viewpoints and integrate their life experiences in a meaningful way. The pastors may have some awareness of this in doing the job of providing special spiritual care for the elderly. Spiritual care means here not merely loving together, feeling together, and living together in the conventional world, but also conceiving, receiving and experiencing invisible divine

grace even beyond this worldly life. As we know, human beings are limited in every aspect; particularly, their life span is very short. So in the spiritual care of the elderly, the pastor needs to relate the limited life of the elderly and their confined understanding to the everlasting meaning of human life. According to Maxie Dunnam,

The call is to give our attention to others. This follows naturally our consideration of time yesterday. Time and attention go together. But the truth is that we can give people our time without giving them our attention.<sup>3</sup>

Although pastors are busy with other matters, they should realize that caring for the congregation in general and that for the elderly in particular is one of their prime responsibilities. They need to pay close attention to the elderly with special care, close companionship, and proper education about the reality of death and life after death. For they are confronted with the fear of death as well as loneliness. They need a friend with whom they can share the depth of their inner heart filled with fear.

#### Pastoral Care Contact: A Case Study

K came from South Korea. K was born into a lower-class farming family with a Confucian background and had no formal education. At the age of five, her father passed away and her mother was forced to support K and K's younger brother by farming, hand-weaving and sewing. Later, the work became K's chore; K began helping her mother when she was a child.

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<sup>3</sup> See Maxie Dunnam, The Workbook on Spiritual Disciplines (Nashville: Upper Room, 1984), 151.

After her marriage at age 16, she had to work for her family of six children, widowed mother-in-law, and husband's kinfolk. K's married life was very tough, particularly her relationship with her husband and her mother-in-law.

K's husband, now 82 years old, is a retired truck driver. He has been impetuous and loveless to K. He had problems with alcohol, gambling, and extra-marital love-affairs. One of K's most painful memories about her husband is the way he looked down on K's family because of her alcoholic brother's squandering of property. K's husband not only forbade her brother and mother to approach K, but also forbade K to see them or speak of helping them. K's mother-in-law, who passed away about 15 years ago, treated K harshly and took sides with her son (K's husband). She forced K to take on her mother-in-laws odd habits. K was not allowed to look in a mirror, comb her hair, wash her face with soap, or sweep her room or yard. The Korean elderly often associate cleanliness with barrenness or loss of luck. K was expected to work like a slave.

K tried to run away from her husband several times, but she failed every time at first because of her mother's strong objection and, later, out of concern for the welfare of her six children. "You are a married woman, and you should not have any idea to get out of your husband's house even if you are in an impossible situation to death," K's mother told her when she was about 21 years old. Troubled with indigestion and neuralgia, K's only joy in life was

bringing up her six children, giving them an education, sending them to high school, and helping them grow into well-behaved men and women.

K and her husband emigrated to the United States in 1981 at their oldest daughter's invitation. After their emigration to the United States, things turned out more favorably for K and less advantageous for K's husband; K got what she had always wanted, except for her health. In the U.S., the house work was less demanding, her husband stayed home, and her adult children acknowledged her past hardship and the sacrifices she had made for them. On the other hand, K's husband became helpless and isolated after losing touch with his drinking and gambling friends. K and her husband began attending a Christian Church about three months after their immigration.

During the four years since her conversion, K has struggled with chronic ailments, finding relief only with the help of medication and prayer to God. In the process of relating her ailments to her faith, she has suffered feelings of hatred for her husband and her mother-in-law. She suffers from ambivalent feelings of hatred and Christian love toward her depressed but still domineering husband. She has not consulted anyone about the ambivalence that makes her ill.

In the first interview, K talked about her chronic ailments and her hardships in Korea. Her pale, somewhat swollen face and her rough hands offered proof of her words.

In the second interview, K was concerned about the Christian faith, and wondered whether her ailments could be healed by praying to God. Although K thought of her elder son as most important to her, she considered her second daughter-in-law nicer than her first daughter-in-law. This is the reason why K and her husband decided to give their property to the second son and spend the rest of their life with him and his wife.

In the following next four sessions, K confessed her feeling of guilt about her hidden hatred for her husband and her mother-in-law. She also implied that she wanted her husband to beg for her forgiveness for the way he mistreated her. In addition, K said that she has neither close friends, special hobbies, nor social activities other than her passive church life.

Figure 1 shows K's family relationship: K's relationship with her husband is blocked and they only relate to each other through their adult children and grandchildren.

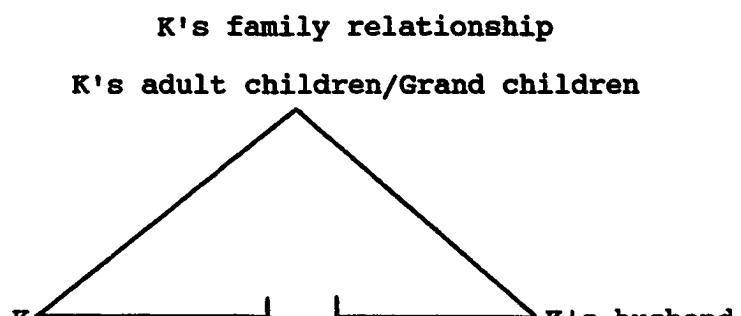


Figure 1

Figure 2 shows how K relates to God: K directly relates to God through her concern for health, including perhaps, concern about her future death, and indirectly relates to God through her feelings of guilt for not forgiving her husband and mother-in-law.

K's guilt-feelings circles

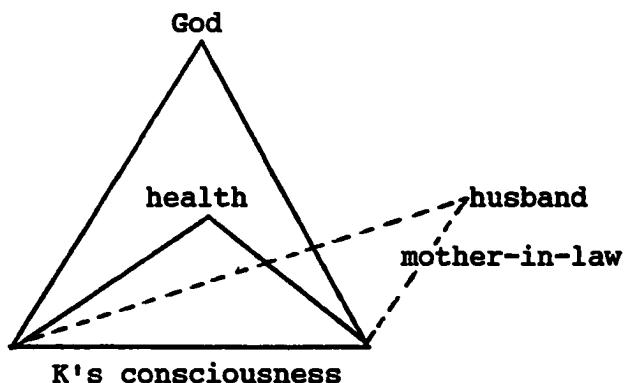


Figure 2

This analysis of K's feelings has taken several steps. At first, I suspected that K's guilt feelings were related to her internalized moral values, values instilled in her by her family.

What are the internalized values that make K feel guilty? Confucian custom teaches traditional Korean women to practice gentleness, meekness, acquiescence, obedience, and sacrifice. The characteristics of K's relationship to others show that K has internalized these values as her ideal self-image. When examining oneself against such a value

system, one easily falls victim to a false guilt caused by particular cultural values in a patriarchal history rather than by God.

For K, the basic source of meaning in life is her family and, more specifically, her six children. Her identity has been organized around typical "oriental" or "Korean" maternity. Except for her mother-child relationships, K seems to have no basis on which to develop a sense of self-worth. In one sense, her values have been organized around motherhood: (1) family (esp. children), (2) financial stability, (3) health, (4) education for children, (5) some guilty feeling of hatred, and (6) in depth, a fear of punishment for not loving her husband.

When the interviewer asked K, "How do you feel about the possibility of living another five or ten years in the U.S.A.?" she said, "I do not think I will live another five or ten years." At that point, the seriousness of K's health condition became apparent. K's guilt-feelings might be a manifestation of her anxiety about her pre-imagined death for she presupposed and was afraid of certain punishment based upon the guilty. To go one step further, underneath such anxiety there might be K's unconscious effort to move her "validation as a person" from her relationship with her children. That is to say, K's guilt-feelings may be a transitional phenomenon used to transform her center of validation, even though the interviewer must admit that K's guilt feelings are closely related to the state of her

unforgiveness of her husband. At this point, K's feelings of guilt ought to be put in quite a different context of spiritual growth. Considering a pastoral function of a local pastor, a pastor should help K to transform her inner guilty feelings to her personal relationship with God.

There are some ways to approach K's situation:

(1) To lead K to see that her particular guilt-feelings are not of God but of her uncritically internalized (traditional Korean folk) values. A pastor needs to inform her that God invites K to be free from them rather than tied to them.

(2) To help K realize that while Jesus loved people, he was also very critical of them, often getting angry and dehumanizing them. Internal cursing against her husband surely deserves to be forgiven by God. God now invites K to promote her full humanity through overcoming her passivity.

(3) To assist K in gaining insight into her desire to be on the road to God and to be accepted by God. God invites K to accept through her guilty feeling that she has already been redeemed by God without any merit on her past. Such concern and care, however, cannot be of much help to K without caring sympathy and Christian love. Especially, when she identifies her worth of life only with her children, her feeling of loneliness and alienation from her children makes her feel worthless and meaningless. This means she needs special care and a sense of transformation from despair in human beings (her children) to hope in God.

At this point, a proper pastoral and spiritual care for the elderly not only helps her to get rid of the fear of death but also the problems of loneliness and generation gap.

## CHAPTER 6

### Death and Eternal Life

Is eternal life real or possible? Everybody has to die someday; this is a human limitation. Physically, at least, death neither allows someone to return nor change themselves after death. It is final.

Yet a more important issue is the Christian faith in eternity. For one of the most important issues among the Korean elderly as well as people in general is the fear of death and harsh punishment. This idea comes largely from the traditional Korean folk value system. Therefore, we need to redefine the theological meaning of death and life after death.

What is eternity? Eternity is a possibility even though eternity is one of the puzzles to the human mind. In order to give an answer for the anxiety of death among the elderly, we need to clarify the reality of death and the possibility of eternal life. At the beginning, we had better start by defining it metaphysically and then to imply its practical dimension.

The past influences and limits the present and future: because of its unlimited possibilities, the future can influence both the present and the past. Mere anticipation of the eternal life secures and makes the elderly feel comfortable. On the other hand, in the modern world, the reality of soul or the mind is neglected or even denied. According to David Griffin, however, our mind and soul can

exist after our bodily death, beyond our limited bodily conditions.<sup>1</sup> If this is so, then the reality of "life after death" can give a different kind of hope to the elderly; they do not have to despair just because they are near death.

Long ago, Socrates had struggled with the problem of death and the human shortage of understanding of this matter. In Plato's Phaedo, there is a discussion about Socrates' attitude toward death.

"Come, Crito, let us obey him. Let someone bring the poison if it is ready; if not, let the man prepare it.".... And he offered the cup to Socrates who took it quite cheerfully, Echecrates, without a tremor or any change of feature or color, but looking at the man from under his eyebrows as was his wont, asked: "What do you say about pouring a libation from this drink? It is allowed?" "We only mix as much as we believe will suffice," said the man...." And while he was saying this, he was holding the cup, and then drained it calmly and easily.... He walked around, and when he said his legs were heavy he lay on his back as he had been told to do, and the man who had given him the poison touched his body, and after a while tested feet and legs, pressed hard upon his body and showed us that it was cold and stiff. He felt it himself and said that when the cold reached his heart he would be gone. As his belly was getting cold Socrates uncovered his head--he had covered it--and said these were his last words "Crito, we owe a cock to Asclepius; make this offering to him and do not forget." But there was no answer. Shortly afterwards Socrates made a movement; the man uncovered him and his eyes were fixed. Seeing this Crito closed his mouth and his eyes.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> David R. Griffin, God and Religion in the Postmodern World (New York: State University of New York Press, 1989), 134-36.

<sup>2</sup> Plato, Phaedo, trans. G. M. A. Grube (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1977), introduction.

Socrates attitude toward death was quite peaceful. Socrates did not show any fear of his coming death. Rather, he worried about the cock he owed to his friend. He was in peace at the time of his death. He welcomed his death as a liberation from his body.

What I intend to emphasize is that anxiety or peacefulness about death depends upon one's attitude toward and the deep understanding of the nature of death. This means also death itself is not fearful as much as the elderly in general have thought. Ironically enough, a Korean Confucianist during the Yi dynasty was not afraid of dying, but of being shamed by someone. Honoring his family and bold heritage as well as honoring himself was much more important than being dead. Therefore, we can find records of how a Confucianist severely criticized Christians: in his sight, a Christian was so selfish that he or she was merely eager to live longer, not concerned about fellow human suffering and social justice. When a Christian idea of life after death is mixed with a traditional folk ideas, it causes people to understand death not as the final victory of God and a reconciliation with God, but as punishment or reward. This is not a correct biblical view; therefore, we need to rearticulate the depth and truth of death to our congregations anew.

In short, one of the elderly's primary concerns may be their coming death and the life after death. Even though they have been converted to Christianity, their

understanding is largely influenced by a traditional Korean (Shamanistic) perspective. As a result, their perception of death is, for them, not value neutral or a potentiality for reconciliation with God but a fear or at least an anxiety of punishment.

#### Death and Eternity

At this point, it may be important to reflect on the Hindu view of death. The basis of Krishna's spiritual instruction is the idea that the multitude of things and events around us are but different manifestations of the same ultimate reality. This reality, called Brahman, is the unifying concept which gives Hinduism its essentially monistic character in spite of the worship of numerous gods and goddesses. Brahman, the ultimate reality, is understood as the "soul," or inner essence, of all things. It is infinite and beyond all concepts; it cannot be comprehended by the intellect, nor can it be adequately described in words: "Brahman, beginningless, supreme: beyond what is and beyond what is not. Incomprehensible is that supreme Soul, unlimited, unborn, not to be reasoned about, unthinkable."<sup>3</sup> This means that we cannot predecide the condition and environment of "life after death," which goes beyond human intellectual ability. This is solely depended upon Brahman.

A similar doctrinal teaching is also found in our Christian tradition. In detail, it is not wise to

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<sup>3</sup> Fritjof Capra, The Tao of Physics (Boulder: Shambhala Publications, 1975), 87.

presuppose a condition of eternal life, wrong or right, in advance. It seems for the Christian faith that human beings cannot choose whether to obtain eternity or not. Rather, it is a gift from God, received freely.<sup>4</sup> This idea of gift is emphasized more strongly than that in Hinduism. Furthermore, death offers something new in quality: to be surrounded by God's rule and reunited with God. It can be called a new relationship between human beings and God. Therefore, death is no longer a tragedy at the end of human life; death is a celebration of the beginning stage in a new life. These theological concepts should be taught to the elderly and will reduce the emotional burden of the elderly who are afraid of death.

According to modern science (as opposed to postmodern science), the body cannot function without a brain. The brain is located in the head. The brain contains proteins, and those proteins regulate many functions of the body. The brain controls all sorts of physical, emotional, and cognitive functions. Such an understanding is uncritically accepted by most people in the name of "scientific truth." Then, a question consequently follows: how does the brain interrelate with the mind and the soul? This question may not be answered only by the contemporary advanced medical science.

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<sup>4</sup> Knut Schmidt-Nielsen, Animal Physiology (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1960), 53.

The issues of death and immortality are often discussed from a religious perspective exclusively. However, death and immortality are not unrelated to the biological functions of the human body and soul's life after death. Since death is believed to occur when the brain does not function any longer, the implication is that the brain's organic function is presupposed to be a whole person. But one cannot reach the root of the brain's original ground even today.<sup>5</sup> The secret of life still remains as mystery even in the field of science. And thus, scientific truth is

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<sup>5</sup> At conception, there is neither a brain nor other organic matter. At the moment of conception, there is only a fertilized egg which carries the Y chromosome from a man and the X chromosome from a woman. The two chromosomes unite to make a living organism. For nine months, once settled in the matrix, the fertilized egg develops into a fetus. Is this a miracle? Or, is this one of orders of the cosmos? Then, specifically when does what we call the mind and soul begin and where are they located? A fetus may become a human being at the moment of conception, at birth, or after its birth. Stephen W. Hawking states: "In order to explain the ideas that I and other people have had about how quantum mechanics may affect the origin and fate of the universe, it is necessary first to understand the generally accepted history of the universe, as the known as the 'hot big bang mode.'" Quoted from Stephen W. Hawking, A Brief History of Time: From the Big Bang to Black Holes (New York: Bantam Books, 1988). At the big bang itself, the universe is thought to have had zero size, and so to have been infinitely hot. I will now focus on Hawking's theory about the hot big bang model and zero size. It seems that these theories are related to the fertilized egg at conception. What is the relationship between the universe's zero size at the hot big bang and a fertilized egg at conception? Both begin from zero size. The question now becomes what causes or undergirds the zero size in both the big bang and the fertilized egg at conception? It can be assumed that there is a cause for the zero size. Then what is it? If these questions about causes could be resolved, the issue of the interrelatedness between the human body mind and soul could also be resolved. Then, the issue of life after death could be resolved as well.

able neither to provide the final answer nor to resolve the anxiety of death.

Our hope in the eternal life depends upon our faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and his promise to come again. Even though this cannot be rationally proved, we experience an intrinsic transformation from hopeless to hope depending not on our own merit. Such an extraordinary religious experience defends our faith in the possibility of resurrection and eternal life. Christian pastors should firmly reaffirm this confession to the people who are in stress and fear of death.

#### Summary

The world is like a magic glass. Our mind, body and soul (spirit) are also like a magic glass. These three parts are truly interrelated within a person. They cannot be separated from each other. Generally speaking, a human being consists of the mind, body and soul. We can see body; in contrast, the mind and spirit cannot be seen. The mind can be, to some extent, felt; the soul cannot be felt by our sensory organs or feelings. The junction of the human brain and its processes are physical at first, but they may go beyond a mere physical process; instead, there is a complex combination of body, mind and soul.

The Buddhist concept of sunyata (emptiness) helps to explain the nature of soul (spirit). This concept tells us that everything comes from nothingness, and returns to nothingness, beyond our ordinary perceptive capability. The

visible world may be paralleled with suchness (everything); the invisible world with emptiness (nothingness). These two worlds are not separated from each other to the illumined eye; only the illumined eye can possibly see the dynamic provocation of the soul.

How can it be compared with the Christian doctrine of soul? What is the uniqueness of Christian concept of soul? The Bible proclaims that our soul is linked to the Holy Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit makes it possible for us to communicate with God to perceive reality as it is, and to actualize our potential as Christians in this world in our anticipation of the final victory overcoming the threat of death. The Holy Spirit is the source of empowerment and fulfillment for a Christian not only in this world, but also in the world to come. For this reason, the Holy Spirit can be defined as an empowering and transforming source for the fulfillment of humanity and for the final hope of the eternal life. The Christian idea of soul emphasizes the initiative of God.

In addition to such a doctrinal foundation, we have to accept given situations and realities as they are. Ontological limitations and existential boundaries in the realm of time and space, particularly shown in human death, are good for Christians, for people need to be humble in their existential life and to be hopeful for the life after death by depending upon God's grace. For the elderly, such openness and allowance is the strongest power possibly given

by Christian faith. Thus, one must be proud to be a Christian who wants to love and forgive unconditionally and be responsible to God.

Ministers should talk with the elderly about their death and dying: Death may not be the final word, but instead something new in the qualitative life of being: reunion with God (Ultimate Reality) or transformation from "nothingness" to "somethingness" making one recognize his or her total relatedness with every living being as well as to see "happiness" (nirvana) in the midst of "suffering" (samsara). So, death is not a tragedy at the end of human life; death is a celebration at the final stage of life, enjoying the abundance of the present life and anticipating the fullness of the future life (after death). Such pastoral care will encourage the elderly to confront their anxiety and fear of death, making their present life more meaningful with a great sense of hope.

I would like to end this chapter by referring to my recent interview with a 92 year-old lady, highlighting the aspect of blessing upon death. She is now too weak to stand by herself. Even urinary activity is not possible by herself; her daughter-in-law cleans her mess. She cannot even hold her spoon. All she wants is for God to release her from this worldly life. She is eager to leave this world. If everyone did not die, but lived forever without having the power to hold her own spoon, what would happen? One who is craving to live should consider such a miserable

situation too. From this account, death itself is not a punishment of God against a sinner; instead, it is a new start to build our closer relationship with God. I believe the pastor should teach this simple truth in his or her Bible study class or personal counseling session and let the elderly bravely cope with death.

The following chapters will survey the current ministry for the Korean-American elderly. This survey gives us an objective picture on how the Korean American churches neglect the importance of the ministry for the elderly as well as how it is an urgent task for the coming century.

## CHAPTER 7

### **Summary of Case Studies: The Ministry with the Elderly in Korean Immigrant Churches**

There are two major problems the Korean-American churches are facing these days: namely, ministry for the youth and for the elderly. Certainly these are very challenging problems not only for the church, but also for the society. However, there are many active programs to deal with the problems for youth, while there are not as many efforts for the elderly.

The following are samples of typical responses of the Korean churches to the ministry with the elderly.

#### Seoul Covenant Church

Pastor Soon O. Park, who is pastoring the Seoul Covenant Church located in Flushing, New York responded to my question that is about the ministry with the elderly, "Our ministry is primarily focused on mission and children's ministry." He added that ministry for elderly should be resolved by themselves. In this church, there is a prayer meeting for the elderly, named "Mela," which means "salt." This group has regular prayer meetings, fellowships, days for group medical diagnosis, and so on, which is organized by themselves. For the future of the elderly ministry, Pastor Park replied that he and his church cannot afford to deal with this issue because of other demanding issues such as children's ministry, but he hoped that church can provide cemetery lots or apartments for those who cannot afford them

by themselves. He commented also that church is not a nursing home. There are 300 members in this church, of which about 10 percent are elderly persons.

#### Full Gospel New York Church

The lay elder Hyung Rak Kim of the Full Gospel New York Church (Pastor: Nam Soo Kim), which is located in Flushing, New York, responded to my question about the ministry with the elderly, "We don't have any specific programs for elderly." But there are four mission groups, named "Glory Mission," "Rebecca Mission," "Abraham Mission," and "Issac Mission," the last of which consist of elderly, aged over 60. The major mission activity of these groups is to help the homeless. There are 1,500 members in this church, which was established 20 years ago. Comparing the size of the whole congregation and its total budget, the program and budget for the elderly are extremely weak.

#### New York Young Nak Church

Speaking of the ministerial budget for the elderly ministry in his church, Pastor Se Won Han of the New York Young Nak Church in Corona, Queens, New York, said, "We cannot allocate any money for this specific purpose, but we organize programs through discussion with the 'Elderly Fellowship.'" He added, "Our ministry is focused on the second generation, rather than the first generation. Therefore, our concern for the elderly cannot be our primary mission." He said that he is willing to do and should do ministry for elderly, but it has to wait. Like other

churches, this church has a mission group, "Hope Mission," which consists of those who are over 60 years old, and they organize all the programs by themselves. For example, they have a "Feast for the Elderly" in May, "Gift Giving" on Mother/Father's day, and other sightseeing programs. (There are 120 members in this church, including 17 elderly members.)

#### Flushing Full Gospel Church

"Programs for elderly belong to the social workers," declared Pastor Soo Chul Park of the Full Gospel Church in Flushing, New York. However, he added that the church provides transportation and helps with social security problems. He emphasized mission and education for the second generation, "We have organized many educational programs for the second generation, youth, and young adults; but we cannot afford to reach out to the elderly." Instead, this church organizes "sightseeing" for the elderly twice a year and gives "Gifts" for the elderly on Mother/Father's Day. In the future, the Pastor hopes that the church can provide a space for a "College for the Elderly". There are 300 members in this church, including 20 elderly members.

#### New York Holy Spirit Church

Pastor Tae Keun Kim of the New York Holy Spirit Church in Flushing, New York, said, "We do not have any specific program for the elderly, because there are not many elderly in this church." There are only 7-8 elderly members in this church. But he is willing to develop programs for the

elderly in the future. He emphasized that the elderly should have their own programs to recover their self-esteem and to enhance their binding with their children and grandchildren. Also they should get a sense of achievement through service for community as well as for the church.

New York Man Baik Sung Church

Pastor Sang Mo Kim of the New York Man Baik Sung Church in Staten Island, New York, said that "Respect for the Elderly" is one of the most important themes the immigrant churches should emphasize. Therefore, the church should serve the elderly in their own context. For example, in this church, there is a dining area set up exclusively for the elderly, so that they can have fellowship and feasts together after church services. This is served by younger members of the church. Comfortable furniture is provided for the elderly by the church. "Hope Mission" mainly consists of elderly members of this church. They learn English, general common knowledge, art, and calligraphy on Sundays and administer a school for the elderly during the week. Also there are sightseeing programs for elderly in Spring and Fall. For a mission, they send \$2,000 annually to the Philippines and Dominican mission programs.

The first service of 1996 was organized by and for the elderly members. There was a choir, consisting only of the elderly members, which sang the first service of the year. In coalition with neighboring Korean churches, they visit nursing homes weekly. They provide Korean style lunches and

hair cuts in addition to worship services. There is also a class only for the elderly lead by a lay elder. There are 360 members in this church including 150 children and 30 elderly members. This church can be classified as a successful case, yet more intensified spiritual care and pastoral care as well as special education to help them cope with death are not provided.

#### New Jersey Ban Suk Presbyterian Church

Pastor Eui Gon Hwang of the New Jersey Ban Suk Presbyterian Church has a special interest in the elderly ministry. He got a D.Min. degree from New York Theological Seminary in elderly studies. This church does not have any special programs for elderly yet, but the elderly members are raising funds for future ministry through Sunday fellowship and organizing a group, "DongShimHoe." They have already established more than \$8,000. The major goal of this group is fellowship and their children give gifts on special holidays such as Mother/Father's Day and Christmas season. They provide turkeys for neighbors at Thanksgiving and plan to purchase a cemetery. They also have sightseeing programs bi-annually and often invite neighbors for dinner. Pastor Hwang mentioned, "The Korean church cannot develop programs for the elderly due to the lack of resources." Furthermore, he added, "Many pastors and members of the Korean churches do not understand the elderly matters, but we should develop new programs for the elderly in the

in the future." There are 200 members in this church including children and 20 elderly members.

**Grace Korean United Methodist Church**

Pastor Jonathan S. Lee of the Grace Korean United Methodist Church has implemented many programs for the elderly in the past 10 years. The elderly fellowship which has been supported by Grace Korean UMC and, yet, is an independent group from this church began with 20 members, but now there are more than 350 elderly members. This is one of the most successful developed regular programs for the elderly. The compassion for the elderly of this church is grounded in the ministerial vision of pastor Lee. Pastor Lee made up his mind to focus his ministerial effort in a three fold way when he began his first ministry in Wyckoff, New Jersey: a center for spirituality, center for the elderly, and center for the second generation.

This is the only church which regularly budgets for the elderly program. The annual budget of \$6,000 was planned to operate a "Feast for the Elderly" in May and monthly worship services and fellowships for the elderly. In 1986, they started to invite neighboring elderly people for a feast by providing transportation with the church van through United Methodist Women's organizations. Now, with the help of neighboring churches, they have monthly fellowships of 150 members, different churches taking turn to host the dinner. It has facilitated the birth of the Association of Korean Elderly (Chairperson: Yoon Sik Choi)

and it draws many elderly people including those who are not churched.

#### Summary

In sum, the survey was in principle executed by selecting a church from each denomination by random sample. The regular attendance of these churches averages from 100 to 200 adult persons. (Full Gospel New York Church has around 2,000 members.) Churches with average attendance below 100 were not surveyed. Initial survey on these churches did not show any significant ministerial activities for the Korean American elderly. The selected churches also represent the geographical character of Korean American churches.

This survey examined responses and the current situation of Korean churches for the elderly in the New York and New Jersey areas, and reveals some very important concerns for the elderly. There is only one church, among the eight churches mentioned, that specially budgeted for the elderly programs, even though every pastor and church shows a great interest and commits themselves to education for the second generation. As I mentioned before, this survey objectively shows how the Korean American churches do not pay proper attention to the elderly ministry as well as how the elderly ministry is urgent for the coming century.

It is clear that the number of the elderly will increase in the near future, especially among Korean speaking congregations. The elderly will be isolated not

only from society but also from the church if each church and pastor does not prepare for this important ministerial area.

## CHAPTER 8

### **Ministry with the Korean-American Elderly: Models for Effective Ministry**

Some Korean-American churches have organized support groups for the elderly. For example, in Covenant Korean United Methodist Church of Pomona, whose pastor is Eun Chul Lee, there is an organization for the elderly called "The Meeting of the Mission of Abraham." They meet every Sunday, and members share their feelings and inner conflicts with each other. There are 15 members in the organization, out of approximately one hundred and fifty church members. This church has been influenced by the elderly who excise a strong sense of leadership in the church. The elderly act as consultants to the church for long range planning, expansion of Church buildings, cell group meeting, and etc.

#### Organizing Supporting Groups

This "Mission of Abraham" is built upon the face-to-face relationship among the elderly of the church. This reminds me of Donald E. Miller's argument in Ministry with the Aging. Miller states:

If the face-to-face relationships within a community are understood to be the place where faith is formed, then Christian education for the aging will be planned in face-to-face groups. Such groups never isolate relationships from content. Learning occurs as much in the interaction between the intentions and commitments of persons, as in their ideas. Not only expressed

promises, but also the implicit network of promises becomes the setting of learning.<sup>1</sup>

Face-to-face relationships are of great importance to the elderly in overcoming the problems of loneliness, powerlessness, helplessness and alienation, and could be a basic element of elderly support groups, maximizing the potential for inclusive ministry of the local church beyond age difference.

A group for the elderly can be established and run by the elderly themselves. They can overcome their feelings of loneliness and despair by becoming active participants in their mutually supportive group. This group's projects may include Bible study, recreation, tour programs, etc. Also, the elderly group can work closely with the women's program, student's program, and young adult program in the church. For example, they could help the women's program by helping with a bazaar; they could sell food they made themselves. They could serve food to the young people participating in church cleaning or other special activities in the church. There are other projects for support groups listed below. These suggestion will help Korean American ministers and churches to notice the importance of the elderly ministry as well as to utilize the power of the elderly for the whole church's inclusive ministry. Otherwise, we bury this potential ministry in the ground like the one talent of the foolish steward.

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<sup>1</sup> Donald E. Miller, "Adult Religious Education and the Aging," Ministry with the Aging, ed. William M. Clements (New York: Haworth Press, 1989), 244.

### Class Meetings

The elderly are encouraged to have meetings at their apartments; this program is not hindered by their immobility. They have several weekly meetings in which they study the Bible, pray, and fellowship at their apartments. This meeting will include an Elderly School. Courses in various areas are offered for the elderly. The courses, such as "Health in Later Life," help the elderly get new information. This school also enables the elderly to participate more actively in the church and in social activities. The education of the elderly is intended to help them develop their potential and overcome problems in later life such as hopelessness, helplessness, isolation, and loneliness.

### Visitation Teams

The pastor can invite the elderly people to be on a visiting team. Thus, the elderly encounter new life situations through their visitation. They could gain fresh insight into their own life while talking with other church members. At the same time, the elderly feel gratified while talking to one another and reflecting on their past lives. Furthermore, they are appreciated for what they do for the church, which makes them feel important to the church. This activity can make the elderly feel more vital and like they are necessary persons in the church. In turn, it gives worth to their life. For this activity to work well and to be continuously executed, we need to develop a related

activity. One of the possible activities is the "First and Third Generation Game" It is a bridge building activity. For example, the pastor can initiate meetings between the elderly and the youth in the church. They meet as grandparents and grandchildren, to sing together and play fun games. This meeting is aimed at reducing the generation gap and creating a sense that everyone is one family bound by Christian faith. Another is group tours. Group tours are arranged for the elderly once or twice a year. This program is supported by the church and the elderly's adult children.

#### Development of Programs for the Elderly

Two plans to help set up a long term program for effective elderly ministry are now presented. These examples show a way to develop programs for the Korean elderly. These programs need the participation and support of all church members. Especially, the second suggestion demands the pastor's special care and concern for the elderly. Plan 1 is a simple and long range plan for the ministry with the elderly. Plan 2 focuses on a Bible study class for the elderly.

#### Plan 1

Below are some simple but effective methods a pastor can utilize in his or her ministry for the elderly:

1. Help the elderly make their later life more pleasant and meaningful.

2. Have weekly meetings with the elderly in the church.
3. Encourage them to participate in church activities; for example, the pastor gives the elderly small jobs such as putting stamps on church letters and mailing them to church members who were absent the previous Sunday. In addition, he encourages the elderly to be active in early morning prayers, over-night prayers, mountain prayer meetings, etc.
4. Plan the filial piety-tour program: The elderly are given paid sightseeing tours a couple of times each year.
5. Give special attention to the elderly and present them with gifts on holidays such as Parents Day, Easter, Thanksgiving, Christmas, etc.
6. Provide the elderly with recreation time.
7. Hold seminars on health and provide the elderly with medical check ups.
8. Conduct the older adult school.

#### Plan 2

In the previous chapter, I presented actual case studies from eight different churches. We can come to a tentative conclusion about the environment of the elderly's living style. Considering these living conditions, what would be the most proper attitude for a pastor who is ready to be involved in the elderly ministry?

I will illustrate this by an additional plan. Rev. Chi is in charge of a local church in downtown Los Angeles. He leads a Bible study program for the elderly every Wednesday night.<sup>2</sup> Rev. Chi told me about his ministry for the elderly in the church. First of all, he approaches the elderly as if he were really their son and grandson. He feels as though they really were his parents whenever he meets them. He prefers to tell stories from the Old Testament to those in the New Testament, and frequently uses Old Testament stories in his Bible class for the elderly. For example, he uses the story of King David, and many others. Bible study classes are given on Wednesday nights from 7:30 to 8:30 P.M. When he began the Bible study, there were ten members in the group. The group grew to twenty people. Since the elderly do not own cars, he had to drive many of them to and from the church. It took more than an hour. There were five males and fifteen females in the group. Their age ranged from 60 to 80. They have various living styles.<sup>3</sup> All of the

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<sup>2</sup> I interviewed Jun Ho Chi, on 28 Dec. 1991. He was a student in the M.Div. program at the School of Theology at Claremont. The membership of his church is about 100, including about 15 elderly members.

<sup>3</sup> Among the twenty elderly people, the various life styles are noted as follows: Two of the older women live together as roommates even though they are not relatives. An 80-year-old man lives alone. He has several adult children in New York and other states, but prefers to live alone. A 65-year-old woman lives with her 70-year-old brother. Her brother does not have any real estate, but she has some property. This is why she was separated from her adult children. Her adult children wanted to inherit her properties before she was ready to give them away. Her brother has paralysis. There are another three couples who are living with their adult children; they are conservative

twenty older people have lived in the United States for over ten years. According to Rev. Chi, these older people feel neither loneliness nor despair. Because he treats them as if he were really their son or grandson, the elderly feel comfortable with him and enjoy the Bible study.

As shown in this plan, we can see that the Korean American elderly people live in six different living situations:

- (1) living alone.
- (2) living with a spouse.
- (3) living with a roommate.
- (4) living with one of his/her siblings.
- (5) living with one of his/her adult children.
- (6) living with his/her in-laws.

On the surface, they live much like the American aged (1, 2, 3), but they try to live together in a more communal way (5 & 6). Most people, even living with his or her spouse, feel the sense of loneliness or powerless when they do not live with their children. There seem to be several reasons for this. First, the life style of the extended

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in that they want to uphold Korean traditions and live by the values derived from Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism rather than Christianity. The remaining two couples are separated from their adult children; these couples appear to be more devoted Christians than do the others. Among them, one man suffers from aphasia and his wife has a disk condition. Finally, there are two elderly women who are in-laws. They are in their seventies and live together. One of them had uterine cancer and recently had surgery, so she stays home all day. This means that a pastor cannot classify them in the category of "older people"; instead, special care for each person is demanded.

family system is still an ideal for the elderly people. The traditional sense of communal living based upon a Confucian filial value system has quite a strong influence on the elderly who live in the United States even today. Second, the habits and education which were given to the elderly were the extended family system. This means that a habit given in early age is not that easy to be broken. It is a kind of tenacity that this habit will not change, even confronting a foreign environment. Third, as one becomes older, one tends to love his or her past. This may be a kind of retrospective nostalgia.

As it was highlighted in the Rev. Chi's case, we can come to some conclusions about what are the most important methods for working with the elderly as follows. They also show what attitudes are necessary for the participants who are involved in the Korean-American elderly ministry:

1. Respecting the elderly as if they were real family members.
2. Providing them with Korean things, customs and, stories while behaving according to Korean customs.
3. Also, the sermons given to them were not theological but more like story-telling.
4. A pastor's sincerity is the critical factor in working with the elderly.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The aged do not have as many desires like the young. They know how society operates. They know the pastor's busy

5. A pastor has to have a mind set to be ready to learn wisdom through the elderly's experiences.

6. A pastor should build his/her personal/intimate relationship and respectfully love.

However, problems of the elderly are not simple matters which can be solved by a pastor or a local church alone in a short period of time. A possible solution at this particular moment is for pastors to encourage the elderly to support one another and keep living in a communal way, as well as to encourage the congregation to pay special concern to their care developing the church programs. This emphasizes that the elderly themselves should be the subject in resolving their problems. The pastor should be an initiator to effectively handle this problematic issue.

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life and the pastor's mind as much as they know their own adult children.

## CHAPTER 9

### Development of Practical Models for the Elderly in the Local Church

The previous chapter dealt with general attitude and basic method for an effective elderly ministry. This chapter will suggest concrete strategies for executing ministry with the elderly in a local church setting. In fact, the problems of the elderly might be an endless subject throughout human history, but there is hope. Their fear and anxiety about death can be overcome by proper spiritual guidance of the pastor, by teaching them the reality of life after death and eternal hope. However, it seems that the more important thing for the elderly is their actualization of their lives in the world. Now, the concrete strategy for effectively approaching the elderly ministry will be discussed in detail not only for the Korean ministry but also the ministry in general. We will inquire how some American churches execute the elderly ministry in a proper way, develop programs for the elderly, and assist them to establish local churches firmly.

#### Program Planning and Action

Program planning is very important because it is the first step toward action in supporting a ministry for the elderly. It must begin with study to identify needs of the elderly. A survey to identify the needs of older persons in the congregation and community is basic. Leaders in community social service agencies can be very helpful in

this regard, and even more helpful will be the older persons themselves.<sup>1</sup> Certainly, the elderly themselves are true resources for program planning. Also, social workers or city agencies are very helpful as resource. If there are no social workers or city agencies, an announcement to the congregation can be helpful to find people who are capable of planning. The following are some specific suggestions for program planning.

First: Identify specific needs of older persons in church. Second; With active input from older persons, plan appropriate support ministries to meet identified priority needs. The Council on Ministries could set up a Committee on Aging of persons who have interest and time to devote to it. Older members should be well represented on such a committee, with all age groups having input and representation, as well. As this committee begins its work, they will want to find out who the aging are, where and how they live, what are their needs, and what are their interests. Third: Find facilities, materials, funds and people resources to assure sufficient strength of the program. All workers at the local level may be volunteers. Fourth: Regularly evaluate the program/ministry. New needs may be revealed in the process.<sup>2</sup>

These suggestions are very helpful for program planning in the ministry with and for the elderly. They are very concrete and effective. Because the needs of the elderly are very diverse, as much as local churches are often quite

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<sup>1</sup> See Robert M. Gray and David O. Moberg, The Church and the Older Person (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1962), 143.

<sup>2</sup> See United Methodist Church, A Ministry to Match the Ageing: A Report of the National Consultation of Older Adult in the United Methodist Church (Madison, N.J.: Health and Welfare Ministries, General Board of Global Ministries, U.M.C., 1982), 54.

diverse, surveying and identifying their needs should be the first step. (During this process of survey, we even encourage the participation of the elderly, resolving their problems of loneliness and powerlessness, partially.)

In order to set up a plan for the elderly ministry successfully and to carry out it effectively, as A Ministry to Match the Aging suggests, organizing a committee is crucial. After the committee is established, it should act to determine what facilities and materials are needed, what funds are available, and which people will volunteer to join the program.<sup>3</sup> From these activities, the elderly people will enjoy the sense of ownership and find out the importance of their roles. By the same token, this will help to remove or at least to reduce their problems of loneliness, powerlessness and uselessness.

#### Uniqueness of the Local Church

Before we proceed with our discussion here, we need to be careful about our obvious oversimplified generalization. For we should realize that every church has its own situation as shown by the summary of the eight church case study: each church has its own unique situation and each pastor's attitude and ministerial philosophy is different.

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<sup>3</sup> Obviously, raising funds is one of the most important tasks to the programs because without funds they can do nothing. The funds would be donated (as they are, for example, in the United Methodist Church) by church budgets, special organizations (such as United Methodist Women/Men/Youth), special funds from such sources as district and annual conference mission money, and individual and private gifts.

Thus, plans for ministry for and with the elderly should have a particular planning, programming, and action which appeals to its own context, since every church is unique.

The role of the church in relation to older people, we must realize, of course, that every church is unique. No two churches are identical in their membership composition by age, race, social class, occupation, and other characteristics. They differ in social and cultural traditions, environmental settings, and administrative organization as it actually function in the details of their work. Some churches are in the country, others in the city, and still others in suburban areas; some are large while others are very small; some have a large number of well-educated lay leaders while others have none; some have many older people in the church and the surrounding community, while others have very few.<sup>4</sup>

It is very important to realize that every church is unique. Korean-American churches usually do not have budgets planned for the elderly because Korean churches often are not able to recognize the seriousness of the problems of the elderly in church as non Korean American churches do. The problems of the elderly are usually secondary problems among the ministerial priorities. However such a negligence leads to serious problems. On the one hand, the elderly's distress, anxiety, and powerlessness weakens the dynamic of a local church. Their miscommunication and complaints against the youth cause the youth not to attend the church, ultimately. On the other hand, the church forgets the elderly's potentiality. Most

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<sup>4</sup> Gray and Moberg, 142.

of the elderly are still physically strong enough to work for God and church. Gray and Moberg emphasize this aspect:

People of all ages need to continue to be useful, to feel wanted, and to be creative. The church can help people who suffer from the societal discrimination of ageism, with its reassures to disengage from work and withdraw from their areas of active participation, to realize that they still can contribute to the well-being of others. Many of their contributions can be made through volunteer services in the church itself.<sup>5</sup>

They offer resource for the mission and evangelism. Robert D. Wheelock even said:

Many of the elderly do not need to be ministered to, but rather will be co-workers in the ministry. Under the title of elderly or aged, we find persons who are ill and others who are healthy; persons who are completely or partially dependent on others for nearly all their needs, and persons who are totally independent. These latter have been called the invisible elderly because they are not seen as elderly by anyone. If a person is reasonably well, active, and independent, he may prefer to live his life as he chooses and not be considered among the elderly.<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, Korean churches need to find ways to ministry with the elderly in making plans and programs. A action with and for the elderly should begin not in the future but right now.

The matter can cause double difficulties because most Korean churches are gatherings of people who immigrated. The members of Korean churches are still influenced by low income, culture shock, the language barrier, and so on, as

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 172.

<sup>6</sup> Robert D. Wheelock, "The Church's Response to the Elderly: Congregational Perspectives and Opportunities," Ministering to the Elderly, ed. John H. Morgan (Wichita: Institute on Ministry and the Elderly, 1977), 35.

mentioned in Chapter 4. Korean immigrants must first adjust to a different society. Therefore, a general plan and program for the elderly executed in American churches cannot be automatically applied to Korean-American ministries which stand in a very unique situation. From this account, we must develop distinctive models for the Korean-American elderly.

#### Ageism

Ageism, which means discrimination based solely on how old one is, as well as sexism, racism and classism, should be overcome by all people, by society, and by the churches. For example, there is a woman who is over sixty five years old. She, however, is not dependent on her young adult children despite her age. She is healthy. She lives with her husband who is healthy too. They can drive, so they can go anywhere without anyone's help. They attend church every Sunday regularly. In their case, who can say that they are aged? Therefore, the aged should not be discriminated against simply because of how old they are.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> It is not easy to define the elderly. Who belongs to the elderly? Are the real elderly those who are physically over 65 years old? It can not be the truth. Biological transitions of the body are a natural phenomenon. Everybody would have a transition by paths of time from birth to death. Ages such as ten, twenty, thirty, sixty, and seventy are just called so by people and society. It seems that there was no counting of age (what we call seventy or eighty years old) in the prehistory of human beings. This is because there was no calendar to calculate the month or year mentally, physically and spiritually all together. Age could not be determined only by a person's ability. In fact, ministry "for" the aging should be changed to "with and by" the aging.

There are many people who have successful lives in their later years. As William M. Clements says:

Age has tended to be ignored as less significant than other qualities when the processes of historical distillation took place. For example, the fact that John Wesley was eighty-one when he reluctantly decided to ordain missionaries for America was neither important nor amazing. Today, however, we note (with some surprise, it seems) that Pope John XXIII was seventy-eight when he called Vatican Council II.<sup>8</sup>

In Chapter 2, I presented and discussed the elderly's role and status in the Old Testament and Early Church. It may be that there was no ageism in those eras; the elderly were protected by society, assisted by family, respected by all people, elected as advisors, counselors, and judges by the community and royal council, and finally, acted as blessers to the next generation. Today, however, the role of the elderly has changed. The elderly now face ageism which might be explained as the treatment of the elderly as burdens or as unnecessary, unessential, uncalled, unpleasant, obstructing people. There seems to be very limited space for the elderly.

Certainly, congregations must recognize that the elderly are still very important people and effective resources for mission and evangelism. "Equally important is that everyone must learn that older persons have a useful role to play in the work of God through His church."<sup>9</sup> Therefore, a pastor should take two directional steps:

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<sup>8</sup> See Clements, Ministry with the Aging, 1.

<sup>9</sup> See Gray and Moberg, 140.

first, a pastor should teach the elderly how they are important and encourage them to have self-esteem as well as to participate in evangelism and service for God in actual settings. Secondly, a pastor should teach other congregation members how the elderly are important members for Kingdom building and church development. Lastly, a pastor needs to provide a time to share these two group experiences and to remove presupposed bias against other group.

#### Financial Problems

If the elderly have no financial or physical dependency, nobody can call them "burdensome people." This is a conventional truth. No matter how old they may get, even eighty or ninety years old, their age itself is not a problem if they have power in terms of finance and self-control. By the same token, we can assume that many elderly people tend to keep themselves away from the church because of their financial difficulties:

[A] factor that may tend to keep the aged from attending and feeling secure in church is their inability to continue to contribute to it financially. A large proportion of older people have had to adjust to reduced incomes; many cannot afford to contribute as freely as was once possible.<sup>10</sup>

Financial power of the elderly might solve some ageism, but not all of it. If older people have more economic power than younger people, they will not be disregarded by their families, by society, or even by their churches in the

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<sup>10</sup> See Ibid., 126.

capitalistic society. It seems that the church has been corrupted ever since materialism and mammonism emerged through the industrialization of civilization. The value of a human being is sometimes calculated by his/her possession of money.

In some Korean ministries which mainly focus on quantitative (church) growth, a main issue is increasing the church budget. Thus, clergy tend to visit the rich and the younger church members more frequently than the elderly and the poor. This makes sense, for if there is no money, the church can do nothing. However, the church should be concerned with human dignity rather than money if it wants to keep faithful to the original calling. Where is the place for the poor and the elderly if the church ignores them? "The lack of funds sometimes causes persons to stay away from the church, even though the gospel through the ages has made no distinction between the rich and the poor."<sup>11</sup> There should not be discrimination against the poor, the elderly, the rich, or the young in the church. Modern churches and clergy have to be reminded of and follow what the gospel says.

Regarding this matter, a pastor can approach it in two directions: first, a pastor encourages people in the middle age to save some assets for their coming elderly life, aiming for financial independence. For this task, a church may invite a financial advisor and may have educational

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 127-28.

seminars from time to time. Second, a pastor also emphasizes and teaches the congregation Biblical teaching on financial matters and the beauty of simple life.

#### Transportation Problems

The problem of transportation seriously affects the elderly in Korean churches as well as Korean-American churches. As mentioned in Chapter 4, immobility is a serious problem the Korean elderly are facing. "Many older people are kept away from church because of transportation problems."<sup>12</sup>

For example, there is an old Korean woman who is over eighty years old. She wanted to attend church services regularly, but could not because she is too old to drive. Sometimes, she attends services when a neighbor drives her. She lives alone. Her house is quite far from the church and from neighbors who belong to her church. The church does not have any busses or vans that can be used for members who do not have a car. Bus stops and subway trains are too far for her to walk to because she has particular neuralgia on her legs. She, however, wants to go to church. In this situation, who can help her? This example is an actual situation even though she was a medical doctor previously. A structured support system must be utilized for such a person. One practical suggestion which is now executed by some churches is to operate a church bus; a volunteer driver would be more effective if we consider the long term

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 130.

financial burden. Some small churches can organize a transportation committee which consists of volunteers who willingly give a ride to the elderly on their way to the church.

The detailed plans will be as follows; there are some alternatives resolutions to this problem. Three possibilities are:

(1) The organization of a transportation service committee to coordinate neighborly sharing of rides. For this, a pastor needs to encourage the whole congregation to participate in turn as well as to carefully figure out the geographical condition and human relationships among the congregation.

(2) Additional needs may be met through operation of a van or small bus equipped with easy wheelchair access. Considering the effectiveness, voluntary drivers are demanded.

(3) Good community transportation may include taxis, buses, and subway train, with coordinated routes and special services.<sup>13</sup>

A few Korean churches have vans or small buses to be used for members having no cars as well as for elderly members, but there are still problems because a driver is needed, and the capacity of the van or bus is limited. Furthermore, members may live far away, time schedules are

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<sup>13</sup> Frederick J. Schenk and James V. Anderson, Aging Together, Serving Together (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1982), 18.

difficult to coordinate, and so on. (These problems are in turn directly related to the budget.) In order to solve these related problems, I would like to strongly suggest that the representatives of the elderly people should be members of the planning and operating committee. To excise the sense of ownership is crucial. At the same time, as the elderly are the main beneficiary, their commitment and participation will make this program work well.

#### Physical Illness

Another problem facing the elderly is that they often cannot participate in the ministry or attend church because of poor health. "An increase in the extent and severity of physical illnesses is a common experience in later life. It is another reason why older persons stay away from the church."<sup>14</sup> Physical illness is a terrible thing among the elderly. Longevity and health are one of the greatest blessings according to an Oriental Saying. This is because losing one's health can mean losing everything.

The Medicare and Medicaid systems provide physical and financial help to the elderly. Although they are helped by those economic benefits, the elderly who suffer from physical illnesses cannot have a sense of well-being spiritually or emotionally. That is why an important role of ministry with the elderly is to take care of the elderly spiritually and emotionally. Spiritual needs can also be called emotional needs. Emotional needs can be understood

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<sup>14</sup> See Gray and Moberg, 131.

more easily than spiritual needs. There is an Oriental saying that, "Becoming elderly is like becoming children." It seems that the elderly and children have similar feelings and emotions such as pureness, honesty, simplicity, fear, receptivity, and so on. Although their feelings might have different depths, there are still many similarities between them. "Many older people have a sense of insecurity, a feeling of insignificance, a fear of death, or a sense of regret for past mistakes or failures."<sup>15</sup>

As I stressed before, fear of death is a typical example. The elderly wonder about life after death, even though they have attended church every week and accepted the Sacrament once a month. Indeed, even though it is not easy, a pastor should talk aloud in depth about religious matters such as where we come from, where we go, life before birth, life after death, sin, the cosmos, and so on. A pastor, however, should teach such matters with the elderly or dying persons in sermons and spiritual care. In fact, if the church can not help these people, who feel insecure or unsatisfied spiritually and emotionally, the church will lose its identity and integrity altogether. Therefore the church should speak this message out. Not only does this message discuss spirituality, but also it deals with the needs of overcoming ageism:

A primary task of the church is to help satisfy people's spiritual needs. Some of these needs relate clearly to social and cultural forces which

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 145.

aggravate the problems of aging persons. The church's spiritual ministries should help to overcome the ageism and gerontophobia which are so widespread in our society. Spiritual problems are at the center of many of the personal burdens, as well as the societal rejection and ageism, which plague the elderly.<sup>16</sup>

#### Education

It seems that in general, churches do not offer elderly classes in Sunday school. Elderly classes, however, should be given in Sunday school in addition to youth class. For a general Bible study or Sunday school does not properly deal with the elderly issue; at the same time, as I mentioned several times in my thesis, special cares and proper education exclusively for the elderly is urgently demanded. But, there are some adult Bible classes that depend on the church's facility and schedule. For example, many churches hold meetings to learn the Bible for half an hour or an hour just before the main service on Sunday and Wednesday night or Friday night. This is not a program for the elderly only, but is open to all members. The problem is that most Korean churches have limited facilities and depend on other Caucasian churches. They often have to rent churches from English speaking congregations and to suffer from limited facilities. It is difficult to offer a variety of programs to meet the needs of all members, especially setting up for the elderly exclusively and dealing with their own problems particularly. If a church is able to organize a volunteer transportation committee, this committee may be able to give

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 144-45.

a ride to the elderly during the weekdays. For either in the morning or in the afternoon, the church facilities usually are not occupied.

Regardless of whether they have their own church building or not, churches should develop and implement education of and for the elderly with a focus on lifelong learning.

It is important to keep on learning as long as we live. We need to keep on learning in order to cope with a rapidly changing world. We need to keep on learning in order to be interesting persons to have around as friends and companions. We need to keep on learning in order to allow some color and excitement into our lives. Lifelong learning is stimulated and supported when there is a community of persons committed to the process of learning together and when a well-designed program of education is available. Creative and self-starting persons will develop and pursue their own plans for learning. One of the participants in the consultation wrote: "You are never too old to learn."<sup>17</sup>

Education can help both elderly and young people. "The church also can help younger people preparing for their later years, thus preventing many of the problems that occur in late life or alleviating their severity."<sup>18</sup> This is a very important role of the church because younger people should be taught to accept the life span process as they become older. Particularly, during this learning process, the elderly can have the sense of self-esteem, that of belonging, the assurance of salvation, and the truth of the order of salvation (especially for Methodists). Thus, they

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<sup>17</sup> UMC, A Ministry to Match the Aging, 42

<sup>18</sup> See Gray and Moberg, 147-48.

can overcome the problems of loneliness, self-degradation, and alienation. The education for the elderly functions not only for the elderly themselves but also for the younger people's preparing their future life. By doing this, a pastor or church leaders are able to enhance the concern of all church members on the elderly issue.

#### Visitation

There are three different groups of elderly: well-elderly, living in the community (approximately - 80 percent of all elderly), severely impaired elderly living in the community (about 14 percent), and residents in nursing home (around 6 percent).<sup>19</sup> The well-elderly can participate directly in the church because they are healthy. Even though they are over sixty five years old, many people in the first group can drive and can participate in church and community activities. They do not need to be visited frequently. Instead, they can be rather utilized as home visiting volunteer members for other congregational members after a demanding process of lay leadership education.

The second and third groups have many physical, emotional, psychological, social, and spiritual problems. Perhaps visitation of the elderly should be focused more on the second and third groups than the first. Or, systematically develop the first group as the home visiting volunteers; let them visit and counsel the second and third

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<sup>19</sup> Sheldon S. Tobin, et al., Enabling the Elderly (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), 12.

groups after a certain period of fulfilling the required education. Through this, a pastor can encourage them to build a strong and close human relationship between them, building mutually supporting groups. This relationship in turn contributes to enhance the dynamics and bond of all church members.

#### Financial Matters and Fund Raising

Obviously, raising funds is one of most important tasks to the programs because without funds they can do nothing. The funds would be donated (as they are, for example, in the United Methodist Church), by church budgets, special organizations (such as United Methodist Women/Men/Youth), special funds from such sources as district and annual conference mission moneys, and individual and private gifts. Drives for fund raising or some related events will encourage the church members to pay special concern for the elderly ministry, to prioritize this ministry as one of the most urgent tasks, and ultimately to allocate demanded budget for the elderly ministry.

Most Korean churches have a program called "Tour of Filial Duty" for the elderly once or twice a year, as mentioned in "Development of Programs for the Elderly" in Chapter 8. Generally, this program is a plan submitted to the administrative council which is held once a month. If it is accepted by this council, then the pastor explains to the congregation in public that funds are needed for the program because there are no usual funds for elderly

programs. In some cases, small amounts of funds could be allocated by the church budget. Other funds should be donated by families and private sources.

From now on, first, funds for the elderly must be allocated in the church's budget every year as well as an educational budget for the youth. (New Jersey Ban Suk Church and Grace Korean UMC reflect this item in their budgets.) It should be acted on by clergy and the administrative council. They should remind members that without funds, there can be no action. Also, one must be aware that the elderly can do something for themselves. For instance, a pastor can encourage the elderly to raise funds for their own activities as shown in Chapter 7.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> See Morgan, 34.

## CHAPTER 10

### Conclusion

Korean immigrants have lived difficult lives in the United States, mainly because this environment is foreign to them emotionally and physically. The cultural differences between Korea and the United States are overwhelming. However, in the United States, there is still hope for Korean immigrants, for there are many opportunities for immigrants to transform their lives from negative to positive.

If ministry is a way of making the world better and more abundant, then Korean-American pastors can be pioneers in leading Korean immigrants to make this country better through relevant ministries, including a special ministry for the Korean elderly immigrants. As discussed earlier, the Korean American elderly are faced with and suffer from loneliness, despair, helplessness, hopelessness, homesickness, etc., resulting from differences in cultural values and socio-political system. This causes serious problems in family systems and communication between different generations, and sometimes evokes an identity crisis. However, they can be more hopeful and experience more joy in the new land if they can overcome these problems. In other words, they can learn and grow through their difficult situations. Further, living in a foreign country can be a great chance or challenge for immigrants because they can transform their habit of heart in a more

constructive way in a new land, enjoying the sense of independence.

The ministry with the elderly Korean-Americans should help them keep up hope and enjoy their life. It seems that the later stage of life is the most important stage in life's journey, for in this stage people reflect on their past of suffering and envision their new future in the Kingdom of God. The following remarks will be a practical guideline or a check list for effective elderly ministry:

A local church should strive for:

1. Creating a care context.
2. Providing spiritual and emotional care.
3. Educating life review for the elderly.
4. Educating on aging for both the elderly and youths.

In the actual ministerial context, 10 simple practical methods to enhancing the effective elderly ministry are as follows.

A pastor needs to be ready:

1. To utilize the elderly to become visiting volunteers.
2. To nurture them as lay Bible class teachers.
3. To equip the elderly as counselors.
4. To develop programs for the elderly.
5. To encourage the elderly's active participation.
6. To encourage them to prepare fund raising programs.
7. To make mutual support groups.

8. To increase all church members' sensitivity and concern for the elderly ministry.
9. To encourage the younger to prepare for their elderly life in advance.
10. To set up the elderly ministry as one of the most urgent tasks in his or her ministry.

A limitation of this project is that to some degree it is theoretical and is intended to provide guidelines even though it has involved surveys of hundreds of Korean American churches across the nation. One additional limitation of this study is that it does not compare the problems of the Caucasian elderly with those of Korean-American elderly. Some distinctives are noticed: first, Caucasian elderly people are more financially stable than the Korean American elderly because of their Social Security benefit and other pension plans. Korean American elderly can not accumulate enough pension to cover their aged life. Second, the Caucasian elderly do not suffer from cultural shock or language barrier as the Korean American elderly do. Third, the ratio of the elderly membership in the Caucasian churches is much higher than that in the Korean American churches. For instance, there are many Caucasian United Methodist churches largely consisting of the elderly who are in the age range of 60 and 70. And thus, they are the subjective members and have a strong voice in planning and operating of the church programs. Among the Korean American

churches, we can hardly find such churches. Whereas William Clement correctly remarks,

Despite these circumstances, however, surveys have repeatedly shown that there is frequent contact between the generations via the telephone, visits and letters, etc. So it is not entirely correct to picture the elders as invariably being "neglected" though this is undoubtedly the case in some instances.<sup>1</sup>

Here, we can notice a cultural variation. For the Korean American elderly, their expectation level for the eagerness of living together with their children and grandchildren is much higher than that of the Caucasian elderly. "Frequent contact via telephone and letters" is not sufficient for them. Furthermore, Korean culture is not a well developed culture of "documentation" but that of "face-to-face" relationship. Unfortunately, this study does not fully deal with cross-cultural comparison but mainly focuses on the problems and related resolution of the Korean-American elderly ministry.

Nevertheless, this project's potential contribution is first to provide a vivid picture of the current Korean-American ministry with the elderly covering not only the West Coast of the United States but also the East Coast. Secondly, it shows a common phenomenon of pastors' general negligence on this particular ministry. Thirdly, it points out the urgency of the elderly ministry, which is the most abundant target for future ministry as well as the most

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<sup>1</sup> William Clements, letter to the author, 21 March 1996.

abundant human resources for future ministry whereas the population of the elderly continuously increases. Lastly, it provides some practical and concrete strategies for a healthy elderly ministry by maximizing their participation and by giving them the sense of ownership, suggesting possible implementation to the local church at hand.

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